

Writing a Literary Analysis



What is Literary Analysis?

- It's literary
- It's an analysis
- It's--
- An Argument!
- It may also involve research on and analysis of secondary sources

How is It “Literary”?

- Usually, a literary analysis will involve a discussion of a text *as writing*, thus the term literary, which means “having to do with letters”
- This will involve the use of certain concepts that are very specifically associated with literature

Important Literary Concepts

- *The Basics*
 - Plot
 - Setting
 - Narration/point of view
 - Characterization
 - Symbol
 - Metaphor
 - Genre
 - Irony/ambiguity
- *Other key concepts*
 - Historical context
 - Social, political, economic contexts
 - Ideology
 - Multiple voices
 - Various critical orientations
 - Literary theory

How Can I Learn More?

- There are various handbooks of literary terms available in most libraries.
- There are numerous introductions to literary criticism and theory that are widely available.
- Example: *A Handbook to Literature*.
Harmon/Holman

What is an Analysis?

- An analysis of a literary work may discuss
 - How the various components of an individual work relate to each other
 - How two separate literary works deal with similar concepts or forms
 - How concepts and forms in literary works relate to larger aesthetic, political, social, economic, or religious contexts

How is Literary Analysis an Argument?

- When writing a literary analysis, you will focus on specific attribute(s) of the text(s).
- When discussing these attributes, you will want to make sure that you are making a specific, arguable point (thesis) about these attributes.
- You will defend this point with reasons and evidence drawn from the text. (Much like a lawyer!)

Which is the Best Thesis Statement?

- *Moby-Dick* is about the problem of evil.
- *Moby-Dick* is boring and pointless.
- *Moby-Dick* is about a big, white whale.
- The use of “whiteness” in *Moby-Dick* illustrates the uncertainty about the meaning of life that Ishmael expresses throughout the novel.

How Do I Support a Thesis Statement?

- Examples from the text:
 - Direct quotations
 - Summaries of scenes
 - Paraphrase
- Other critics' opinions
- Historical and social context
- Always remember to read carefully and highlight useful passages and quotes

What is a Secondary Source?

- A book or article that discusses the text you are discussing
- A book or article that discusses a theory related to the argument you are making
- A book or article that discusses the social and historical context of the text you are discussing

How Do I Find Secondary Sources?

- MLA International Bibliography
- Dictionary of Literary Biography
- Discipline-specific sources
 - Example: America: History and Life for American literature
- Other search engines
- A bibliography that is part of your text
- Ask your instructor

Integrating Secondary Sources

- When you use secondary sources, be sure to show how they relate to your thesis
- Don't overuse any one secondary source, or for that matter, secondary sources in general
- Remember that this is your paper, your argument—the secondary sources are just helping you out
- Never, never, never plagiarize. See the OWL handout on plagiarism for more information.

Overview of Literary Analysis

- When writing a literary analysis:
 - Be familiar with literary terms
 - Analyze specific items
 - Make an argument
 - Make appropriate use of secondary sources
 - Consult instructors and tutors for help when needed

Where Can I Go for More Help?

- The Purdue University Writing Lab
- 226 Heavilon Hall
- 494-3723
- And visit <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>
- Or email owl@owl.english.purdue.edu

The End

